Rare 1795 de

THE IMMORALITY OF STAGE-PLAYS IN GENERAL,

AND OF

The TRAGEDY called DOUGLAS, IN PARTICULAR,

Briefly illuſtrated;

IN A

LETTER from ATHELSTANEFORD to the Moderator of the Presbytery of HADDINGTOUN.

Jude verſe 4.—"There are certain men crept in unawares, who "were — of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly "men, turning the grace of our GOD into laſciviouſneſs."—

1 Tim. v. 22. —"Be not partaker of other mens ſins; keep "thy ſelf pure."

EDINBURGH:

MDCCLVII.

BRITISH MUSEUM

A

LETTER, &c.

REVEREND SIR,

THE letter from the Rev. presbytery of Edinburgh, informing you of our minister's behaviour in the matter of stage-plays, did not give us greater pleasure, than the conduct of our Rev. presbytery, in putting off (not without shewing some degree of disrespect to their brethren of Edinburgh) any judicial enquiry into the matter, and even adjourning their next meeting for two months from the time that motion was made to them, did alarm and grieve us. The *fama clamosa* raised about the affair is reckoned such as might have induced the Rev. presbytery to make a proper enquiry into it; and we cannot help thinking that the call and sollicitation of so respectable a body as the presbytery of Edinburgh, deserved to have been immediately listned unto.

Nevertheless, we are unwilling to believe that personal attachment to Mr Home hath prevailed with a court of conscience to bear with his offence; but rather are inclined to think, that the delay was owing to the thinness of the last meeting, the absence of several members of the greatest experience, and especially to the novelty of the affair, which being, so far as we know, the first instance of the kind in this country, deserves full deliberation.

Supposing then, as in charity we are bound to believe, that this was the case, and that the Rev. presbytery are now disposed to resume and cognosce the affair impartially; suffer us, by your hand, briefly to state to them

the facts which give riſe to, and call for your ſpeedy enquiry; and next, to bring ſome proof againſt ſtage-plays in general; then, to offer a few reaſons againſt the tragedy called DOUGLAS in particular; and laſtly, to ſubjoin a few texts of ſcripture, which do (we apprehend, with great ſubmiſſion) point out what courſe the preſbytery ought to ſteer.

For theſe ſeveral years paſt Mr John Home our miniſter hath, as is well known to the Rev. preſbytery, laviſhed much of his time in compoſing and writing plays; and hath once, again, and now a third time, deſerted his flock without liberty, ſometimes for as many months at a time, as, according to the laws of the church, do infer depoſition; and gone to London for the vending and acting of one or more of theſe plays; and not meeting with his wiſhed for encouragement there, he hath cauſed one of them, intitled DOUGLAS A TRAGEDY, to be acted for his own benefit, and that of the comedians, in the theatre in the Canongate, upon Tueſday the 14th of December laſt, and for ſeveral nights following.—On ſome of theſe occaſions Mr Home was preſent, and witneſſed the infamous action; and, whether to make a party, and ſecure peace at home, or from other motives unknown to us, he ſollicited ſeveral miniſters in the South, and enticed his own congregation, to go to Edinburgh, and be preſent at acting the ſaid tragedy, which ſome of theſe miniſters, and a number of his flock, elders and others, did comply with.

None of us having complied with Mr Home's ſollicitations, and the tragedy itſelf not being printed as yet, we are at a loſs to ſtate the contents of it fully, but, by the concurring teſtimony of thoſe who ſaw the ſame acted, ſeveral immoralities are at leaſt indirectly propagated under that vizard. Lady Barnard's whoredom is concealed, under the pretence of a ſham-marriage (a very improper hint to ladies of pleaſure); and though that lady, become deſperate with a load of woe, did miſerably conjecture that ſhe could relieve herſelf, by putting an end to her wretched life, it is ſaid the repreſentation given of her crime is rather calculated to move pity towards the actor, than indignation at the crime: and, not to mention

tion the desperate bravadoes, " I'll risk eternal fire," and the like, his tragedy abounded with solemn invocations of the SUPREME BEING by his most glorious attributes, as, the eternal JEHOVAH, the LORD GOD omnipotent, and the like;—with a nauseous abuse of many texts of scripture, as, " The widow's husband, the stranger's " shield, the orphan's stay," *&c.* and with several shocking oaths, particularly, amongst others, that of swearing " by him who died on the accursed tree to save man- " kind;" all pronounced for the greater pomp of a lying fable, by persons of the most abject characters, in a promiscuous croud, assembled not for devotion, but only for diversion.

Having briefly stated the fact, which we are assured will appear more fully from that tragedy itself, if published precisely as it hath been already seven times acted, we shall next offer some proofs against stage-plays in general. And to begin with the scriptures the only infallible rule of faith and manners;—Our LORD hath taught us, that denying ourselves the sinful pleasures of the world and the flesh, is essential to Christianity. Matt. xvi. 24. " Then said Jesus unto his disciples, if " any man will come after me, let him deny himself, " and take up his cross and follow me." This divine teacher was himself a man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief, and the servant ought not to look for better fare than his LORD got: while we run our Christian race, we are to look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; and while we have him in our eye, our lives should be formed upon the model of his example, and not upon the lusts and pleasures of this world. To the same purpose the apostle Paul exhorts, Rom. xii. 2. " Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transform- " ed by the renewing of your mind." Chap. xiii. 12, 13, 14. " The night is far spent, the day is at hand, " let us therefore cast off the works of darkness.—Let " us walk, not in chambering and wantonness,—and " make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts " thereof;" and the apostle Peter, 1 epistle iv. 15. enjoins those to whom he writes, to be " holy in all " manner of conversation." 2dly, The scriptures do

condemn

condemn vices under expreſſions which the writers againſt the ſtage have uniformly underſtood to be meant of ſtage-plays, as revellings, corrupt communications, and fooliſh talking and jeſting. In this ſenſe they do explain, Gal. v. 19, 21. "Now the works of the fleſh "are manifeſt, which are theſe—Uncleanneſs, laſci-"viouſneſs,—REVELLINGS and ſuch like, of the which I "tell you, that they which do ſuch things, ſhall not "inherit the kingdom of GOD; as alſo 1 Peter iv. 3. "For the time paſt of our life may ſuffice us to have "wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked "in laſciviouſneſs, luſt, exceſs of wine, REVELLINGS, "banquetings, and abominable idolatries, wherein they "think it ſtrange that ye run not with them to the "ſame exceſs of riot." And 1 Peter iv. 29. "Let no "communication proceed out of your mouth, but that "which is good to the uſe of edifying, that it may "miniſter grace unto the hearers." And chap. v. verſes 3,—7. "But fornication and all uncleanneſs or cove-"touſneſs, let it not be once named among you, as "becometh ſaints; neither filthineſs nor fooliſh talking, "nor jeſting, which are not convenient.——Let no "man deceive you with vain words; for becauſe of "theſe things cometh the wrath of God upon the "children of diſobedience; be not ye therefore par-"takers with them." The eſſence of theſe revellings, and corrupt and fooliſh talking, lies you know, in the native tendency which they have to corrupt the mind with impurity, and to incite to and foment uncleanneſs, which Chriſtians ought carefully to avoid: for ſays the apoſtle to the Corinthians, chap. iii. 16.—"Ye are the "temple of GOD—If any man defile the temple of "GOD, him ſhall GOD deſtroy, for the temple of GOD "is holy, which temple ye are." 3dly, Stage-plays being ordinarily made up of fables and lies, ſtand condemned on this account; and this holds ſtronger in the caſe of miniſters than others, as more eſpecially unſeemly in them. 1 Tim. iv. 7. "Refuſe profane and "old wives fables, and exerciſe thyſelf rather unto "godlineſs." 4thly, The ſcriptures do condemn all voluntary conſorting and mingling with wicked perſons,

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and approving of their deeds. The wiſe man is moſt copious on this head, Prov. iv. 14, 15. "Enter not into "the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil "men, avoid it, paſs not by it, turn from it, and paſs "away." The bleſſed man "doth not ſtand in the "way of ſinners, nor doth he ſit in the ſeat of the "ſcornful," Pſal. i. 1. And the prophet Jeremiah could appeal to GOD and ſay, "I ſat not in the aſſembly of "the mockers, nor rejoiced;" but alas, profeſſed Chriſtians, yea ſome miniſters now, can make a mock of ſin, and laugh and clap their hands with the moſt forward, not remembring, that their thus bidding the actors God ſpeed makes them partakers of whatever ſin they are guilty of in the act approved, and that co-partners in ſin do thereby make up a title to a ſhare in one anothers plagues. 5thly, Stage-plays as they are offenſive to the church of GOD, as we ſhall ſhow under the ſecond claſs of authorities, ſeem to fall under the divine prohibition, Matt. xviii. 6. "Whoſo ſhall offend one of "theſe little ones which believe in me, (ſaith our "LORD) it were better for him that a milſtone were "hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in "the depth of the ſea." 1 Cor. x. 32. "Give none "offence, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to "the church of GOD." And 2 Cor. vi. 3. "Give no offence in any thing, that the miniſtry be not blamed." And 6thly, The ſcriptures are moſt poſitive and expreſs againſt all irreligion and impiety, whether by mock prayer, ſwearing, execrations, or abuſe of the ſcriptures. Exod. xx. 27. "Thou ſhalt not take the name of the "LORD thy GOD in vain, for the LORD will not hold "him guiltleſs that taketh his name in vain." Matt. iv. 7. "Thou ſhalt not tempt the LORD thy GOD." Dan. v. 23.—"The GOD in whoſe hand thy breath is, and "whoſe are all thy ways, haſt thou not glorified." Lev. xix. 12. "Ye ſhall not ſwear by my name falſly, neither "ſhalt thou profane the name of thy GOD." Deut. xxviii. 58, 59. "If thou wilt not obſerve to do all the "words of this law, that are written in this book, that "thou mayeſt fear this glorious and fearful name "THE LORD THY GOD, then the LORD will make

thy

" thy plagues wonderful." Prov. xiii. 13. " Whoſo " deſpiſeth the word ſhall be deſtroyed."—1 Sam. ii. 12, 17. " Now the ſons of Eli were ſons of Belial, they " knew not the LORD.—wherefore the ſin of the young " men was very great before the LORD, for men abhor- " red the offering of the LORD," 1 Cor. x. 22. " Do " we provoke the LORD to jealouſy? are we ſtronger " than he?" By all which it appears, that ſtage-plays are contrary to the very genius and ſpirit of Chriſtianity; and that though they found little if any footing in Judea, to which CHRIST's miniſtry was chiefly confined, and ſo are not explicitely noticed by the writers of his life, yet the apoſtles, and particularly St Paul, whoſe travels extended to many places where the diverſions of the ſtage were practiſed, is noways defective in an explicite condemnation of them.

In oppoſition to the above uſe made of theſe texts, a late common-place writer †, but the only one on that ſide who hath wrote with any tolerable degree of diſcretion, alledges that our Saviour did not warn againſt ſtage-plays, tho' much practiſed during the time he appeared in the world; and that the apoſtle Paul doth rather juſtify than condemn them, by quoting with approbation two elegant ſayings from them.

Had this author ſhewed that our LORD did actually approve of ſtage-plays, he had ſaid what was neceſſary for his purpoſe; but this he hath not attempted; nor indeed could he, becauſe a number of the inſtructions which dropt from the lips of this divine teacher do neceſſarily imply a condemnation of the ſtage. For this purpoſe we ſubmit to you Matth. v. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8. " Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit.—Bleſſed are they that " mourn.—Bleſſed are the meek.—Bleſſed are they which " hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs.—Bleſſed are the " pure in heart," &c. And we believe you will agree with us, that theſe Chriſtian qualities are ſcarce, if at all, to be found in the frequenters of the play-houſe, at leaſt that the uſual exerciſes there are badly adapted for furthering the increaſe of theſe graces. Again, our LORD hath

† The morality of ſtage-plays ſeriouſly conſidered.

hath ſo narrowly marked the diſpoſition to uncleanneſs, which the play-houſe is eſpecially calculated to promote, that the "very looker on a woman to luſt after her" is accounted in his perfect reckoning a "committing adul-"tery with her in his heart ‡." And even the moſt harmleſs ingredients of the ſtage are ſifted before his awful tribunal, Matth. xii. 36.—"Every idle word that "men ſhall ſpeak they ſhall give account thereof in the "day of judgment." Should it be ſtill retorted, that the ſtage is not expreſly mentioned; we anſwer, that, according to this way of reaſoning, this author might have argued as juſtly, that becauſe the holy JESUS did not condemn ſtews or brothel-houſes under theſe preciſe names, that they are therefore lawful.—The evaſion here is ſo thin, that we ſcorn to dwell longer upon it: and we hope this gentleman will conſider the matter yet more ſeriouſly; and if he does, he will ſee that his argument carries him too far, even the awful length of charging the SAVIOUR, in whom no ſin was ever found, with ſhutting his omniſcient eye at the ſins committed by the ſtage. But to come to the ſecond branch of this author's reaſoning. Becauſe the inſpired writer hath the words, "For in him we live, and move, and have our "being, as certain ALSO of your own poets have ſaid," two facts are ſuppoſed. (1.) That the ordinary trade of life which the poet referred to was of, was a writer of plays; which is ſaying very little for him, becauſe, according to HORACE and ſome others, the compoſers of plays were generally the very worſt, and the leaſt accounted of amongſt the poets. And, (2.) That the ſacred writer learned the above ſentiment from the profane one, which we cannot admit; not merely becauſe of the particle ALSO, though it intimates that the apoſtle avouched this fundamental truth of the deity as firmly as the other, but becauſe we are taught by him who cannot lie, that the ſacred writers ſpoke not as this or the other profane writer ſpoke, but "as they were moved "by the HOLY GHOST." And for the other expreſſion in 1 Cor. xv. 33. viz. "Evil communications corrupt

‡ Matth. v. 28.

" good manners," ſaid to have been borrowed from the poet Menander; though he were able to ſhew the original copy of Menander, and that the ſaid maxim is in it, which will be found a hard enough task, it occurs not that this could make any thing for his purpoſe; for the infection of the diſcourſes or communications uſed at ſtage-plays, is the great evil wherewith Chriſtians impeach them. So that this inſtance adds great ſtrength to our plea againſt ſtage-plays; and, to diſmiſs this digreſſion, a ſtronger human teſtimony cannot be given to the being of God than that of a heathen, nor a ſtronger evidence of the corruption of the ſtage, than the conceſſion of one of its ſupporters.

2*do*, The ſtage, as it hath been managed in all ages of the Chriſtian world, hath been ever looked upon by the Chriſtian churches of all different communions, as a ſeminary of impiety and vice. The learned Mr William Pryne hath in his *Hiſtrio-Maſtix* afforded us the united ſuffrage of fifty-five councils and general ſynods, conſiſting of great numbers, in different parts of the world, who have condemned all ſtage-plays, excommunicated the actors, and diſcharged under ſevere cenſures any Chriſtian to be preſent at, or otherwiſe to encourage them. Their determinations are too large to find a place here; but a few examples from the above-named author, ſuited to the caſe in hand, may be allowed of. A council in Spain, held *anno* 305, prohibited any Chriſtian woman to entertain or marry any comedian or ſtage-player, under pain of excommunication.——In the African council, *anno* 408, of which St Auguſtine was a member, it was decreed, that no ſtage-player ſhould be admitted a public accuſer.——The ſixth council of Conſtantinople, held *anno* 680, doth utterly prohibite ſtage-players and their interludes;---and if any contemned that canon, he was, if a clergyman, to be depoſed, and if a layman, to be with-held from the ſacrament.——The ſynod held at Turin, *anno* 813, do determine thus: " The miniſters of God ought to ab-" ſtain from all allurements whatſoever, belonging ei-" ther to the ears or eyes, by which the vigour of the " mind may be effeminated; becauſe, through the en-

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" ticements of the eyes and ears, a troop of vices is wont " to enter into the ſoul. They ought likewiſe wholly " to eſchew the inſolencies of filthy ſtage-players,---and " alſo to preach to others that they ought to be avoided." Yea the council of Trent, however infamous in other reſpects, do, in their 24th ſeſſion, *anno* 1563, ordain, " that all clergy abſtain from hunting, hawking, dances, " taverns, and PLAYS; and that they excel in integrity " of manners, that they may be deſervedly called the " ſenate of the church."——Paſſing many other inſtances that might be condeſcended on in the time of Popery, the council of Milan, held *anno* 1560, have this conſtitution: " We have alſo thought good to ad- " moniſh princes and magiſtrates, that they baniſh out " of their territories all ſtage-players, tumblers, juglers, " jeſters, and other caſtaways of this kind; and that " they ſeverely puniſh victuallers, and all others what- " ſoever, who ſhall receive them."——In the Proteſtant ſynod held at Rochell, *anno* 1571, it is decreed that " all congregations ſhall be admoniſhed by their " miniſters ſeriouſly to reprehend and ſuppreſs all dan- " ces, mummeries, and interludes. And it ſhall not be " lawful for any Chriſtians to act, or be preſent at, any " comedies, tragedies, plays, interludes, or any other " ſuch ſports, either in public, or in private chambers; " conſidering that they have always been oppoſed, " condemned, and ſuppreſſed in and by the church, as " bringing along with them the corruption of good " manners." And to name only one caſe more, the council of Tholouſe, *anno* 1590, have this conſtitution: " And becauſe the vices of miniſters are wont moſt of " all to appear, and to come in uſe at the firſt ſight, " and to be accounted more ſhameful, yea, and thoſe " things that are reputed ſlight in others are deemed " moſt hainous in them, we wholly interdict and pro- " hibite them dances, public plays, and all other things " by which they may offend any other men by any hurt- " ful ſcandal." Now, tho' from this ſhort deduction of what hath been the practice of the Chriſtian church with reference to ſtage-plays, it appears that different councils condemned them upon different principles, yet all are

agreed that ſtage-plays are inconſiſtent with the Chriſtian religion; and that not in the dawn only, but thro' the whole progreſs of Chriſtianity; and that the nearer they approached unto purity of reformation, the more hot did their zeal burn againſt ſtage-plays. The practice of Gregory Nazianzen is indeed alledged by ſome to be an exception from the concurring opinion of the primitive fathers; but others do as ſtrongly affirm * that Chriſtus Paſſus, an ancient tragedy, and the only one ſaid to have been Nazianzen's, was falſly attributed to him.

3*tio*, Although, through the pinched circumſtances of this part of the united kingdom, the diverſions of the ſtage could not adventure to the public till of late date, on which account the zeal of our church hath not vented itſelf much againſt ſtage-plays; yet the Larger Catechiſm of the Weſtminſter aſſembly, authoriſed by our own general aſſemblies, and publicly taught in this church, doth inform us, that laſcivious ſongs and ſtage-plays are ſins forbidden in the ſeventh commandment, as being provocations to uncleanneſs. And the genius and ſpirit of ſeveral acts of our moſt celebrated aſſemblies do natively point the ſame way. Thus, by act of the general aſſembly 1596, ratified by the aſſemblies 1638, 1646, and 1694, it is ordained, "That ſuch miniſters as ſhall be found not given to the ſtudy of the ſcriptures, nor to ſanctification and prayer, that ſtudy not to be powerful and ſpiritual, nor to apply their doctrine to corruptions; who are obſcure, and too ſcholaſtic before the people; cold, and wanting ſpiritual zeal;—diſſembling public ſins, and flatterers of great perſons in their congregations,—be cenſured according to the degree of their faults, and, continuing therein, be deprived.——That ſuch as are light and wanton in their behaviour, as in gorgeous and light apparel, ſpeech, frequenting light or profane company, unlawful gaming, and ſuch like, not becoming the gravity of a paſtor, be ſharply and gravely rebuked by their presbytery, according to the degree of their offence, and continuing therein, after due admonition,

* Hiſtrio Maſtrix, p. 834.

" monition, be deprived as ſlanderous to the goſpel.—
" That miniſters being found ſwearers, &c. be depo-
" ſed *ſimpliciter*. —That miniſters given to unlawful
" and incompetent trades and occupations for filthy
" gain,—beſide conſcience and good laws,—and all ſuch
" worldly occupations as may withdraw them from, or
" diſtract them in, their charge, and may be ſlanderous
" to the paſtoral calling, be admoniſhed, and brought
" to the acknowledgment of their ſins, and, if they con-
" tinue therein, be depoſed.——And that miniſters,
" who reſide not with their flocks, be depoſed, accor-
" ding to the acts of the general aſſembly, and laws of
" the realm". So that church judicatures, who are inclined to check the progreſs of the ſtage, are by no means deſtitute of a warrant, in their own conſtitutions, as well as in the ſcriptures of truth. And,

4*to*, The laws of the kingdom, would we claim the benefit of them, do ſecure us againſt this unchriſtian diverſion. For by act of the 10th year of his preſent majeſty, it is enacted and declared, " That every perſon
" who ſhall, for hire or reward, ACT, or CAUSE to be ac-
" ted, any play or other interlude of the ſtage, without
" the ſpecial licenſe and authority mentioned in the
" ſaid act, ſhall be deemed a rogue and a vagabond;
" and for every ſuch offence ſhall forfeit the ſum of
" l. 50 Sterling:" which being the ſolemn Act both of the king and parliament, it will be of greater authority with good men than the example of any individual, the ſovereign not excepted. And though ſome are of opinion, that by an act of the 17th of the king, the infamy wherewith thoſe perſons are taxed by the former ſtatute ſeems to be ſomewhat mitigated, yet the civil pains are continued in their full force.

Finally, As the wrath of God hath been revealed againſt all ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of men, ſo the divine diſpleaſure hath at times burſt forth upon impious and profane ſtage-players and ſpectators in particular. Thus, about the year 1582, many people being met at the theatre in London, there was a ſmall ſhock of an earthquake, at which they being ſore diſmaid, and leaping down

and

and ruſhing to get out, many were cruſhed and bruiſed, and ſome killed ‖. Upon the 13th January 1583, a multitude of people being aſſembled on a ſcaffold in Paris garden, to ſee plays and other paſtimes, the whole ſcaffold fell to the ground, whereby near 200 perſons were killed, or ſore wounded and bruiſed †. In the year 1606, while the Jeſuits at Lyons, in France, were acting a tragedy of the laſt judgment, the Lord, from heaven, ſlew 12 of the actors and ſpectators *. Dion Caſſius records, that, in the time of Pompey, a theatre, in Rome was overturned by a ſudden tempeſt, and many died and were deſtroyed by it ‡. Cornelius Tacitus relates §, that, about the 8th year of Tiberius, there were, at leaſt, fifty thouſand perſons ſlain and preſſed to death at once, with the fall of a theatre at Tridena in Italy, and this was ſeconded with a devouring fire which almoſt conſumed that city. A multitude of people being conveened for interludes at Piſa, in Bavaria, about the year 1200, above 300 of them were ſlain with thunder and hail **. The citizens of Cæſarea being, according to Gregory Nyſſen ‡‡, met upon a public feſtival, in order to celebrate ſome plays to the honour of one of their idols, contrary to the warning given them by St Gregory, newly made miniſter of that city, the plague broke in upon the ſtage, and, like fire, ſuddenly ſeized upon, and devoured multitudes; in-ſo-much that the living were no ways able to bury the dead, but the temples, and ground around the wells, to which they run for relief, were filled with heaps of dead bodies, till, at laſt, the living, convinced of the cauſe of this ſore judgment, renounced their idolatry, and, reſorting to Gregory, intreated him to pray for them, and then the plague ſtopped. Plutarch relates it as worthy of a ſpecial remark, that, during the great plague which raged

‖ Mr Stub's anatomy of abuſes, p. 135. † Beard's theatre of God's judgments, p. 212. * Short treatiſe againſt ſtage-plays, p. 28. ‡ Rom. hiſt. lib. VII. page 101. § Annalium, lib. IV. cap. X. p. 165. ** Aventi annalium Bajorum, lib. VII. ‡‡ In vita Beati Gregorii, p. 312.

ged in the conſulſhip of Caius Sulpitius, and Licinius Solon, a number of play-haunters, and the ſtage-players then in Rome, were ſwept away with it, and not ſo much as one of them left alive. To name no more particulars, the exceſſive expences of the Athenians on ſtage-plays was, according to Plutarch and Juſtin, the very overthrow and deſtruction of their ſtate, and the occaſion of their bondage to the Macedonians. Holy Salvian writes, that the very ſacking of Rome, the deſtruction of all Italy, the ſpoiling of Ravenna, Treves, Marſeilles, Cologne, Mentz, and a great part of France and Spain, by the Goths and Vandals, was a juſt judgment on them for their frequenting and maintaining plays. The Roman hiſtory declares, that whenever their plays and theatres went up, their manners, virtues, proſperity and commonwealth went down, and all God's judgments fell upon them: and no wonder it ſhould be ſo, for wherever ſin goes before, God's wrath and vengeance will certainly follow after. "Sin, when it is fi-"niſhed, bringeth forth death, James i. 15". "For "the wages of ſin is death, Rom. vi. 23".

Having ſhewed, thus briefly, that ſtage-plays, in general, are contrary to the ſpirit and meaning of many texts of ſcripture, and to ſeveral acts and deciſions of our own church, and that they are expreſly condemned by many general councils and ſynods, and by the municipal laws of the realm, and that they have been the objects of the divine reſentment; permit us next to offer a few reaſons which, in our apprehenſion, ſupport, and call loudly for, a preſent condemnation of the tragedy called DOUGLAS, and its author, in particular. As,

1ſt, It hath a native tendency to maintain a trade of life which had its riſe from the devil and his inſtruments, and, as commonly practiſed, doth lead as natively back to him. It is notour, that ſtage-plays were originally invented by poor blinded Pagans, and propagated by them for the gratification of the demons whom they worſhipped, on occaſion of their victories and feſtivals, or for appeaſing them in times of war, famine, or other calamities, and that the devil was permitted, on ſeveral occaſions, to inſtigate and direct theſe his poor ſlaves audibly and ſenſibly to have more ſtage-plays, and to

celebrate them with ſtill greater pomp †, as the authorities referred to do ſhew: and though (bleſſed be God for it) the devil is not permitted to make vocal reſponſes now, as he was wont to do then, yet woful experience teaches us, that the authors and actors of ſtage-plays now are generally the pollution, ſhame, and blemiſh of the Chriſtian church, the depravers and deſtroyers of youth, and ſuch as, in the language of holy writ ‡, are unworthy of the ſociety of Chriſtians, much more of the miniſters of CHRIST: "Do men gather grapes of "thorns, or figs of thiſtles"? Then, and not till then, need we expect to find play-actors the ſincere teachers of morality.

2dly, It proved, in common with others, the rendeſvouz of the leud, the unwary, and of prodigals, who, like the baſilisk and weaſel, kill one another with their looks. It appears, from the authorities referred to in the former paragraph, that none but Pagans, or unchaſte, profane and graceleſs perſons, who were caſt out of the church by public cenſures, were in uſe to attend the play-houſe of old; and muſt it not convince virtuous minds of the great danger of frequenting the play-houſe now, that the ordinary attendants there are unwary youths, who go thither to learn amorous intrigues, wanton ladies to hunt for their prey, and profane gallants to feed their ſenſual pleaſure, to devour their time, and to throw away their money? It is true, that on this occaſion, a number, of better reputation, having been ſollicited by the author, and his friends, or carried away by a ſtrong curioſity to hear the production of a clergyman, did mix themſelves with the others: but ſurely it becomes ſuch to conſider, that their example hardened the reſt in their unchriſtian practices, and grieved the hearts of thoſe who durſt not go

† Clementis Alexandrini oratio exhortatoria ad Gen. fol. 8. Tertullian. de ſpectaculis, cap. V. VII. X. XXIV. Cyprian. de ſpectaculis, lib. I. epiſt. 10. Chryſoſtom hom. 6. 8, 38. Auguſtin. de civit. Dei, lib. I. cap. XXXII. Dyoniſius Halicarnaſſus antiq. Rom. lib. VI. VII. IX. Liv. Rom. hiſt. lib. II. ſect. 36. Hor. de arte poet. Virg. de invent. rerum, lib. I. cap. X. and Plut. de Hom. &c.

‡ 1 Cor. v. 9.

go thither: evidences of this are to be found in the paſquils of the one, and in the admonition and exhortation, &c. of the other. Beſides, this practice was of vaſt conſequence to themſelves; much evil entereth in at the ear, but more at the eye; and by theſe two windows death finds acceſs to the ſoul. Doth not experience, as well as theology, teach us, that our corrupt natures are more liable to be influenced by evil examples than by good ones; and that evil things are more apt to defile that which is good, than good things to rectify that which is evil? whence it comes to paſs, that when good and bad men aſſociate together, the bad are ſeldom made better by the good, but, on the contrary, the good are ordinarily infected by the bad; even as when flour and clay are mixed together, the clay defiles the flour, but the flour cannot refine the clay; a drop of vinegar may ſour a tun of wine; and an inſpired writer tells us, that a "little leaven leaveneth a whole lump †."

3dly, As all plays in general, ſo this of Douglas in particular, hath been attended with a great WASTE of TIME to multitudes, which ought to have been better improved, and can never be balanced by the imaginary conceit of moral inſtruction got by it. For as two blacks can never make one white, no more can the propenſity of the gaudy world to conſume their time at any rate in idleneſs and vanity, apologiſe for a ſtated conſumpt of it in the playhouſe. By this the ſtudent (of whom the law is ſo tender in England, as to prohibit ſtage-plays to be acted within 10 miles of any of their univerſities) hath been diverted from his ſtudy; the lady and miſtreſs from their needle; the mechanic from his trade; the merchant from his buſineſs; the lawyer from ſerving the lieges; the phyſician from attending his patients; and (which we cannot mention without bluſhing at the remembrance of it) by this the grave ſenator hath been pulled away from giving juſtice, and the devoted clergyman from his book and cloſet. But, amongſt all thoſe, the guilt of our miniſter is of the deepeſt dye. Mr Home's time is not his own. By devoting himſelf to the work of the mi-

 niſtry,

† Gal. v. 9.

niſtry, he devoted his time alſo, and all his endowments natural and acquired to be laid out and improved only for the glory of God and the good of mankind ‡, eſpecially of the congregation whoſe ſouls he undertook the charge of. In this calling he ought to have abidden with diligence ||. For our edification he ought to have "given attendance to reading, to exhortation, and doctrine;" to have "meditated upon theſe things, and "given himſelf WHOLLY to them; that his profiting," not as a compoſer of plays, but as a miniſter of the goſpel, "might appear to all †." But, alas! like Ezekiel's falſe ſhepherds, he hath "fed himſelf, and not the "flock *:" not content with his ſtipend, which might ſuffice a family competently, and much more a virtuous batchelour, he hath gaped for gain from the ſtage; and, weary of ſtudy that might be of uſe to the church of CHRIST, he hath loſt his precious time in contriving, compoſing and poliſhing of plays, and in gadding about to find merchants for them, *&c.* The iniquity of theſe practices receives great aggravation from the circumſtances of the time in which they are acted. Beſides many judgments of a ſpiritual nature, obvious to thoſe who are exerciſed to godlineſs, ſword and famine cry aloud to the moſt voluptuous to be humbled under the mighty hand of GOD: for "will the lion roar in the foreſt," ſaith an inſpired writer, "when he hath no prey? and— "ſhall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people "not be afraid?" Surely it becomes miniſters of the goſpel at ſuch a time to "mourn between the porch and "the altar §," and to implore for mercy in the midſt of ſo much deſerved wrath. To make mirth at ſuch a time is like bringing muſic into the houſe of mourning; and to react any of the crimes by which our heavenly Father hath been provoked to contend with us,---in the very ſight, and under the begun ſmart, of the rod, argues ſuch a degree of infatuation, as, according to the uſual courſe of things, forebodes deſtruction imminent and unavoidable. The ſins of ſons and of daughters are eſpecially

‡ Luke i. 74, 75. Eph. v. 16 || 1 Cor. vii. 20. † 1 Tim. iv. 13, 15. * Ezek. xxxiv. 2, 10. § Joel. i. 9.

eſpecially grievous to God, and amongſt theſe none are ſo guilty as a miniſter and watchman.

4thly, Money, another talent wherewith God ought to be honoured, by relieving the poor †, who are in this time of ſcarcity greatly increaſed, was by this tragedy miſapplied to very oppoſite purpoſes. We conceive it clear from the firſt reaſon, that the imployment of ſtage-players is unlawful; and therefore the giving money to them muſt be unlawful likewiſe, in regard it encourages and mantains them in their unchriſtian and leud profeſſion, upholds the play-houſe itſelf, which without ſuch contributions would fall to the ground, and involves the givers in the guilt of thoſe ſins which are committed by the actors, becauſe whatever is given to them is for the exerciſe of their play and act. And as for Mr Home's ſhare in that matter, if the means by which he procured it was unlawful, as the whole of this epiſtle tends to prove, it muſt be diſhoneſt filthy gain, much like the hire of a pander, who lets out or furniſhes the occaſion of ſinning to others; a trade of life on which he could not in faith pray for a bleſſing; neither can he aſcribe that gain to the favour and bleſſing of God, but rather ought to fear leſt it bring a curſe upon his other ſubſtance.

5thly, Altho' the inſtruction of mankind, and inculcating of good morals, be the only plauſible pretence for ſtage-plays, and that miniſters compoſitions (themſelves being compared to the ſalt of the earth ‡) ought of all others to be moſt calculated for this ſalutary deſign, yet Mr Home's keeneſt advocates have not pretended to ſhew that his tragedy anſwers that deſign: on the contrary, none can deny that intrigue, revenge, bloodſhed, murder, yea ſuicide, blaſphemy and impiety make up the great lines of it, as it was acted on the theatre. The company who attended the ſame were as promiſcuous and leud as in any play, and as much time and money were ſpent on it as on any; conſequently it neceſſarily muſt have a native tendency, in common with other ſtage-plays, to corrupt the minds and debaſe

† Prov. iii. 9. & xix. 17. Eccleſ. xi. 1. 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19. ‡ Matt. v. 13.

the morals of mankind, to fill both town and country with ſloth, idleneſs, effeminacy, prodigality, impudence, laſciviouſneſs, contention, profanity, and at the beſt with idle frothy and ſcurrilous diſcourſe. To ſpend time in proving this were idle, becauſe the effects point out the cauſe as clearly as ſunſhine. For inſtance (and one example may ſerve the purpoſe) Your brethren of the presbytery of Edinburgh, having found it their duty, according to divine commandment *, and the example of their truly venerable anceſtors ‖, to warn all over whom they have any charge to avoid the ſinful diverſions of the ſtage, invectives, ſarcaſms and reproaches againſt the presbytery, eſpecially againſt thoſe of them who acted the moſt open and honeſt part in that matter, have ever ſince ſwarmed like locuſts, and compaſſed them about like bees: and by whom? not ſurely by the enemies to the ſtage, but by its friends, who poſſibly embrace this occaſion of railing uncontroulled on the miniſters of the goſpel from a ſtill worſe deſign, namely, that they may give a violent thruſt to religion thro' their ſides; yea ſo ſhameleſly impious are they become, that like their infidel brethren of old they have ſaid †, "As for the word that thou haſt ſpoken unto us in the "name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee, "but we will certainly do whatſoever thing goeth "forth of our own mouth." And when they do thus mock the meſſengers of GOD, and deſpiſe his words, have they not reaſon to expect that as formerly ‡ ſo now "the wrath of the LORD ſhall ariſe againſt them "till there be no remedy?"

6thly, This tragedy hath a moſt powerful and fatal influence to indiſpoſe and incapacitate the ſpectators for

* Ezek. xxxiii. 7, *&c.* ‖ Warning of the ſame presbytery, *anno* 1727. † This is evident not only from the following ſtanza, but eſpecially from the frequenting that tragedy ſince warned againſt it.

Then good people all——attend to my call,
This night to the play-houſe repair;
For to morrow the clergy are gravely to charge ye,
There's no ſin if you ceaſe to go there.

‡ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15.

for religious duties ; to breed in their hearts a diſeſteem of and antipathy againſt thoſe religious perſons, miniſters and others, who are moſt juſtly offended with their practice, and to engage their affections to the love of ſin and vanity. This is too obvious from the inſtances condeſcended on to need new proof ; yet if more be required, let us take a view of the voluptuous gallant, who makes it his buſineſs to attend the play-houſe, and we ſhall find his very library bear witneſs, that plays, romances and ſuch unprofitable ſtuff, are his chief ſtudy, as conſorting almoſt only with his play-mates does prove that theſe are his favourite companions. If at any time the perſons of this diſpoſition go to church, with what ridicule are they accuſtomed to treat the grave doctrines of Chriſtianity ? and if a ſtranger were going into Edinburgh on the preparation day before the ſacrament, might he not conclude, on ſeeing the highways and avenues filled with play-haunters flying the town, that the plague was in it ? 'Tis true, we heard of very watery complexions at acting the ſaid tragedy ; but which of thoſe many perſons, who could not refrain from ſhedding a multitude of tears in the play-houſe, have we ſeen drop a ſingle tear in the church ? (tho even there, without they flow from a believing view of CHRIST as crucified by the perſon weeping, they were no better than the crocodile's) or which of them are remarkable for their ſelf-denial, mortification to the world, delight in holy duties, and for maintaining a life of cloſe communion with GOD ? We dare adventure to affirm, that thoſe who ſtudy holineſs in all their life and converſation will (unleſs they have by their backſlidings provoked GOD to withdraw his conduct from them for a time) account it as poſſible to continue dry in water, or cold in fire, as innocent and without infection in the play-houſe: they are perſuaded that giving their preſence to perſons whoſe trade of life is to pollute the heart and to corrupt the converſation, is not only a quenching and grieving the HOLY SPIRIT, but provoking him to reſent the infinite indignity done to him ; and therefore they abhor the play-houſe as the gate of death, and the houſe of the devil ; for it is their diſtinguiſhing character, that they

" walk

" walk not after the fleſh, but after the Spirit, as know-
" ing that to be carnally minded is death, but to be
" ſpiritually minded is life and peace." And,

7thly, To name no more reaſons againſt this tragedy, it is filled with irreligion and impiety. Spiritual wickedneſs is the greateſt wickedneſs, and feigned ſanctity is double iniquity, ſaith Auſtin, both becauſe iniquity, and becauſe feigned. Now, ſuppoſe we do, for finding this out, make the decalogue our touch-ſtone; The firſt command, which challenges our ſubjection and allegiance to the one true GOD, doth alſo require our worſhipping him in ſpirit and in truth (a); he " will be ſanctified
" in all them that draw near unto him." Nadab and Abihu for " offering ſtrange fire before the LORD, which
" he commanded them not, were both of them devour-
" ed by fire (b)." King Uzziah for a like attempt was ſmitten with a leproſie (c); and, which is ſtill more remarkable, Uzza, who drove the cart whereon the ark, the ſymbol of GOD's preſence, was carried, having, on obſerving that the oxen who drew the ſame did ſtumble, " put
" forth his hand to hold up the ark, the anger of the
" LORD was kindled againſt Uzza, and he ſmote him,
" and there he died before GOD (d);" all intimating to poſterity, that becauſe theſe perſons either had not authority to do the duties they attempted, or ſought not GOD after the due order, therefore they are ſet forth for an example, leſt we ſhould commit the ſame or like tranſgreſſions. Nevertheleſs, Mr Home, diſregarding thoſe duties or theſe beacons, hath crammed his tragedy with prayers, cauſed the ſame be put up unto GOD, in pretence only, in the name of a perſon who, according to his own fable, had thrown herſelf over a precipice ſeveral centuries ago, and ſo is beyond the reach of prayer; by a woman who is prohibited, by the laws of Chriſtianity (e), to ſpeak in a public aſſembly; yea, by a moſt infamous woman, who if the church acted up to their power might, till ſhe acknowledge her offences, be excluded from joining with them in public prayer; and that too in the devil's ſchool,

(a) John iv. 24. (b) Lev. x. 1, 2. (c) 2 Chron. xxvi. 21. (d) 2 Chron. xiii. 11. (e) 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35.

ſchool, the play-houſe; and amongſt a mixed crowd, compoſed, it is to be feared, more of vain and light perſons than of perſons of better reputation, aſſembled at beſt for their diverſion, and not at all for devotion; a practice which cannot conſiſt with fidelity to GOD, and looks rather like treating him as an idol, or (dare we uſe the expreſſion?) as a ſtalking horſe, to ſerve off this tragedy with the greater pomp: and this mock manner of worſhip ſeems no leſs contrary to the ſecond command than the firſt.---Again, can Mr Home, who introduced the diſplay of the moſt amazing love, the crucifixion of the SON of GOD to ſave mankind, as the ſubject of an oath, pretend that he loves and that he honours this SAVIOUR with all his heart? Or will he faithfully reprove the breach of the third commandment by others, while he tranſgreſſeth it ſo groſly himſelf?----If we may digreſs to his jant, with ſome other Rev. brethren, after Sabbath's ſermon, to the Engliſh border, to aſcertain the length of a Sabbath-day's journey, that will prevent any chaſm in our compariſon. And to proceed, doth he honour the king, and revere the church, who flies in the face of their laws againſt ſtage-plays?----Will his lady Barnard bear witneſs of his regard to the ſixth commandment?----Or his love-intrigue, and in general his whole play, ſhew his regard to the ſeventh?----Doth his thirſting after ſuch unlawful gain bear proportion to the eighth?---Doth his building ſo great a ſuperſtructure upon a lying fable conſiſt with the ninth?----Or his graſping at more than his legal ſtipend beſpeak his favour to the tenth commandment?——Further, if we make the pattern for prayer, ſet by our LORD to his diſciples, the criterion whereby to try this matter, the diſparity appears great. Doth Mr Home earneſtly wiſh and pray that the glory of GOD "may cover the heavens," and that "the earth may be filled with his praiſe," who doth thus profane the glorious attributes, and the holy name of GOD, by mock-prayers and impious oaths?---Can his ſo keen and avowed promoting of ſtage-plays, the very trumpery of the devil, conſiſt with earneſt prayer for the coming of CHRIST's kingdom? Doth he yield up himſelf to be governed by the word and Spirit of GOD,

and

and desire to be enabled to glorify him, who doth thus openly contradict the laws and grieve the SPIRIT of GOD, and incapacitate himself for answering the end of his vocation as a Christian and a minister? Is he content with daily bread, or his lawful stipend, who robs the stage to increase his wealth? Is he intent on pardon, who doth thus multiply new and unprecedented transgressions?---And who can believe him earnest for support under, and deliverance from temptation, who courts them with greediness, and rushes on them with all his strength and might?——Once more, when we compare Mr Home's practice with the vows he hath come under, we cannot help thinking the disparity is glaring. In baptism he renounced the devil, the world, and the flesh: but according to the judgment of the primitive reformers, the stage doth chyme in with these. And Mr Home at his ordination vowed to live a holy and circumspect life, and faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully to discharge all the parts of the ministerial work, to the edification of the body of CHRIST: how he hath acted up to this vow, the Rev. presbytery will, it is hoped, inquire, and judge according to the discovery they make.

Upon the whole, as Mr Home is guilty, art and part, of symbolizing with one of the chief vices of Pagans;—of conveening leud, profane and unwary persons in troops, for very unjustifiable purposes;—of a most intolerable abuse and misimprovement of time and money;—of debasing the minds, and corrupting the morals, of mankind;—of indisposing and incapacitating them for religious duties, which ought to be the chief business of life;—and of publishing and promoting irreligion and impiety, to the great dishonour of God, endangering of our holy religion, scandal of the ministry, and offence of tender Christians; all contrary to, or inconsistent with, the plain scope and meaning of many texts of scripture, to the concurring decrees of the Christian church, as well Popish as Protestant, to the genius and spirit of the standards and acts of our own church, and to the express letter of the standing laws of the kingdom: we dare not dissemble that we consider ourselves bound

bound by the higheſt authority (f) to withdraw from Mr Home as a diſorderly walker, and to have no Chriſtian fellowſhip with him while lying under the ſcandal of theſe ſinful practices, "that he may be aſhamed," and that the guilt and ſcandal thereof may not be ſuffered to ly upon him, nor to infect the congregation and church whereof we are members (g). We in our own name, and in the name of all who ſhall adhere to us, do by you TELL theſe things to the Rev. presbytery, as his immediate lawful ſuperiors in matters ſpiritual (h): intreating and beſeeching them; as they regard the glory of GOD, whom he hath ſo greatly diſhonoured; and love his ſoul, and the ſouls of thoſe whom he hath ſeduced;—as they would deſerve the character of Levi (i), "who knew not "his brethren, nor acknowledged his own children" in the execution of juſtice; and of the church of Epheſus (k), "who could not bear them which were evil, and tried "them which ſaid they were apoſtles, and were not, "and found them liars;" and as they would eſchew the awful reproof given to the churches of Pergamus and Thyatira (l), for retaining among them ſuch as "did caſt "ſtumbling blocks before the people, and ſeduced "them;" and as they would not run the riſque of being acceſſary to the guilt of ſo many, who have taken their blood upon their own ſouls (m); that they would "give "full proof of their miniſtry," by declaring unto him "all that GOD hath commanded" to be ſaid in ſuch a caſe (n), by warning him of the evil nature and pernicious tendency of ſuch unruly practices (o); by MARKING and NOTING with the cenſures adequate to his infamy this cauſer of diviſions and offences (p); by avoiding him, withdrawing from him, and "keeping no company with "him, that he may be aſhamed (q);" by REBUKING him, and that too before all, as his public offence requires (r):

(f) 2 Theſſ. iii. 6. 1 Tim. vi. 5. 2 Theſſ. iii. 14. (g) Lev. xix. 17. 1 Cor. v. 6. (h) Matth. xviii. 17. (i) Deut. xxxiii. 9. (k) Rev. ii. 1, 2. (l) Rev. ii. 12,—20. (m) Ezek. xxxiii. 7, 8, 9. (n) Jer. i. 17. (o) 1 Theſſ. v. 14. (p) Rom. vi. 17. 2 Theſſ. iii. 6. (q) Ibid. and 1 Tim. vi. 5. (r) Lev. xix. 17. 1 Tim. v. 20.

and if he neglect to hear the presbytery, that they "PUT "AWAY from among them that wicked person," by DELIVERING HIM TO SATAN FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FLESH, THAT THE SPIRIT MAY BE SAVED IN THE DAY OF THE LORD JESUS; that thenceforth he may be accounted of by the churches of CHRIST "as a heathen "man and a publican ‡.

We shall conclude this missive with two paragraphs to the same purpose out of the confession of faith *, which Mr Home subscribed both when licensed and ordained, *viz.* "Church-censures are necessary for the reclaiming "and gaining of offending brethren; for deterring of "others from the like offences; for purging out of that "leaven which might infect the whole lump; for vindi-"cating the honour of CHRIST, and the holy profession "of the gospel; and for preventing the wrath of GOD, "which might justly fall upon the church if they should "suffer his covenant and the seals thereof to be profa-"ned by notorious and obstinate offenders.——For the "better attaining of these ends the officers of the church "are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the "sacrament of the LORD's supper for a season, and by "excommunication from the church, according to the "nature of the crime, and demerit of the person." We are, *&c.*

Athelstane-ford,
9th Feb. 1757.

‡ Matth. xviii. 17. 1 Corinthians, v. 2, 3, 4, 5, 13.
* Chapter xxx. §. 3, 4.

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